

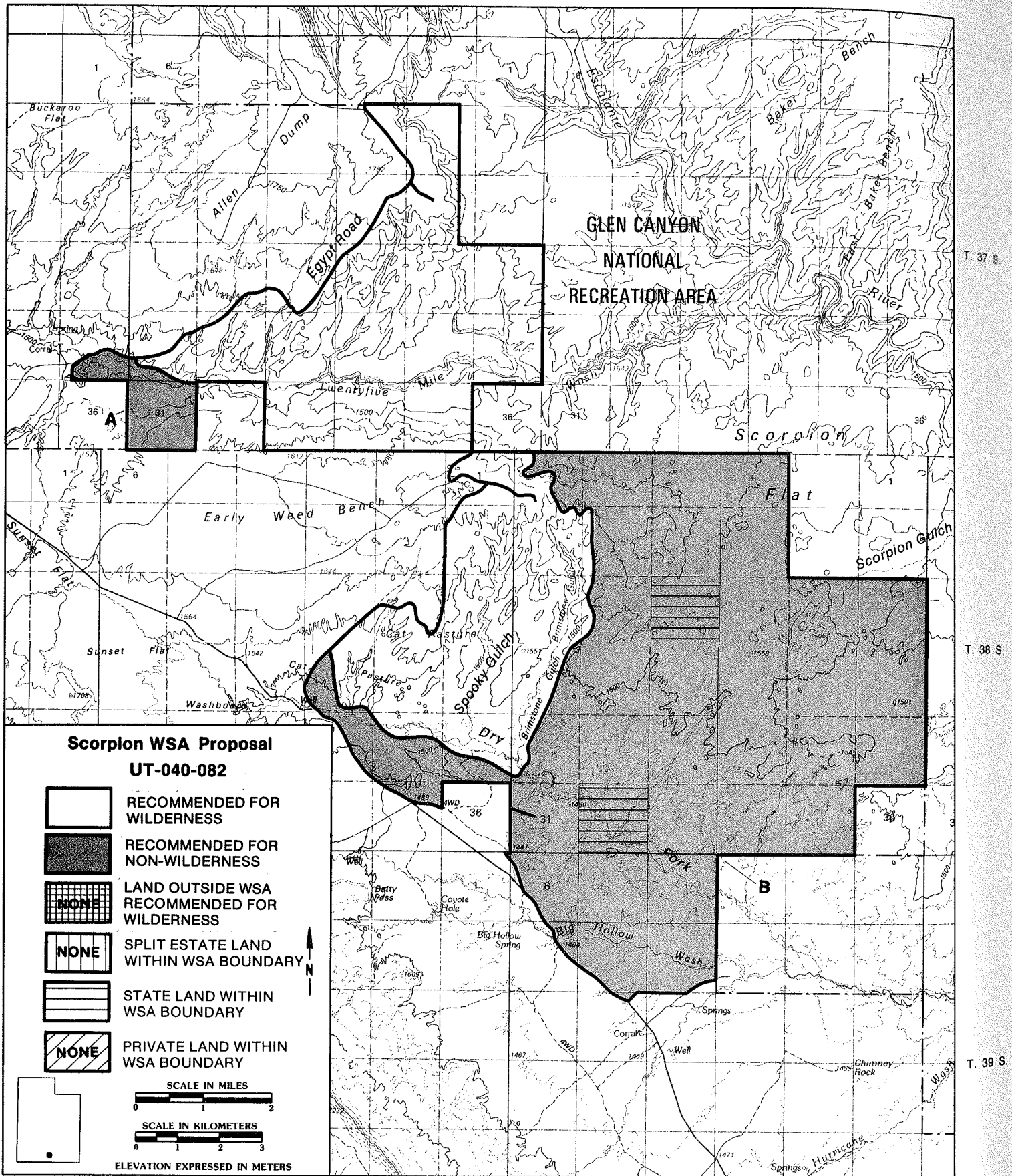
Scorpion
WSA



SCORPION WSA

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SCORPION WILDERNESS STUDY AREA

1. THE STUDY AREA: 35,884 acres

The Scorpion Wilderness Study Area (WSA) (UT-040-082) is in eastern Kane and Garfield Counties, Utah, about 25 miles southeast of Escalante, Utah (population 652). The eastern boundary of the WSA is adjacent to the Glen Canyon National Recreation Area (GCNRA). The remainder of the WSA is bounded by the Hole-in-the-Rock, Cat Pasture, Early Weed Bench, and Egypt roads. In locations where State lands intervene along the GCNRA or road borders, the State section forms the WSA boundary (see Map). The WSA is just east of the Hole-in-the-Rock Road, an historic, improved dirt road from Escalante to Lake Powell, in the GCNRA.

The WSA contains 35,884 acres of public land administered by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). Two State sections (1,280 acres) are within the WSA, but no non-Federal lands are in the portion recommended for wilderness designation (see Table 1).

The study area consists of rugged bench and canyon country deeply dissected by ephemeral streams. The recommended portion of the WSA includes the Twentyfive Mile Wash in the north and short, southwest-trending canyons in the south. Elevations vary from less than 4,800 feet on canyon floors in the northern portion to more than 5,600 feet on the benchlands in the southern portion.

TABLE 1
LAND STATUS AND ACREAGE SUMMARY IN THE STUDY AREA

WITHIN THE WSA	ACRES
BLM (surface and subsurface)	35,884
Split-Estate (BLM surface only)	0
In-holdings (State, Private)	1,280
Total	37,164
WITHIN THE RECOMMENDED WILDERNESS BOUNDARY	
BLM (within the WSA)	14,978
BLM (outside the WSA)	0
Split-Estate (within the WSA)	0
Split-Estate (outside the WSA)	0
Total BLM land recommended for wilderness	14,978
In-holdings (State, private)	0
WITHIN THE AREA NOT RECOMMENDED FOR WILDERNESS	
BLM	20,906
Split-Estate	0
Total BLM land not recommended for wilderness	20,906
In-holdings (State, Private)	1,280

Source: BLM File Data

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Desert shrub is predominant over much of the area, but a large portion is bare rock.

The WSA was studied under Section 603 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) and was included in the Utah BLM Statewide Wilderness Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) finalized in November 1990. Three alternatives were analyzed in the EIS: a partial wilderness alternative where 14,978 acres would be designated as wilderness and the remaining 20,906 acres would be released for uses other than wilderness, which is the recommendation in this report; a no wilderness (no action) alternative; and an all wilderness alternative.

2. RECOMMENDATION AND RATIONALE:

- 14,978 acres
(recommended for wilderness)
- 20,906 acres
(recommended for nonwilderness)

The recommendation for this WSA is to designate 14,978 acres as wilderness and to release the remaining 20,906 acres for uses other than as wilderness. Designation of the entire area as wilderness is considered to be the environmentally preferable alternative as it would result in the least change from the natural environment over the long term. The alternative selected, however would be implemented in a manner which would utilize all practical means to avoid or minimize adverse environmental impacts.

The portions recommended for wilderness designation would include all of the areas in the WSA with high wilderness values. All of the proposed area is natural. Included within the recommendation are areas exhibiting exceptional wilderness character such as the Twentyfive Mile Wash Canyon and the slot canyons and slickrock associated with this drainage, the canyonlands of the Brimstone Gulch-Cat Pasture area, and the upper Dry Fork of Coyote Gulch with its slot canyon tributaries such as Spooky Gulch. The recommended area is adjacent to but excludes the Egypt and Brimstone parking trailheads for backpackers seeking access to areas in the GCNRA such as the Escalante River, lower Twentyfive Mile Wash, and Scorpion Gulch.

Area A not proposed for wilderness designation includes the section of the Twentyfive Mile Wash that lacks entrenchment and is currently used as a staging area for backpacking trips through the canyon portion to the Escalante River. Area B not proposed for wilderness designation includes the portions of the Dry Fork of Coyote Gulch and Big Hollow Wash and the open portions of Scorpion Flat that lack outstanding opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation.

3. CRITERIA CONSIDERED IN DEVELOPING THE WILDERNESS RECOMMENDATION

Wilderness Characteristics

A. Naturalness

Naturalness is defined as an attribute in which the evidence of man is substantially unnoticeable to the average visitor and where minor imprints of man exhibit no cumulative impact that is substantially noticeable. The entire WSA meets the criteria of naturalness. The quality of naturalness in the WSA is related to the natural character of the adjoining lands in the GCNRA. The Twentyfive Mile Wash Canyon and associated slickrock benches continue into the GCNRA with the aggregate effect of enhancing the quality of naturalness in the WSA portion. In the Brimstone Gulch area, a convoluted topography and lack of any imprints of man combine to create an area with very high quality naturalness attributes. Imprints of man within the WSA include 4 miles of ways, a fence across the Twentyfive Mile Wash, a fence above the Dry Fork of Coyote Gulch, and a fence in the Dry Fork below Brimstone Gulch. These imprints combined total about 8 acres (less than 1 percent of the WSA) and are substantially unnoticeable.

In the Scorpion WSA, the high naturalness quality has not changed since the BLM Intensive Wilderness Inventory in 1980. No additional imprints have occurred in the WSA.

B. Solitude

Approximately 73 percent of the WSA lacks outstanding opportunities for solitude. The opportunity for solitude in

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the WSA is essentially dependent on screening from the terrain. Narrow, winding canyons totalling 56 miles within the WSA are the major determinants of solitude. Twentyfive Mile Wash and its side canyons, the Dry Fork of Coyote Gulch and especially its narrows, and the side canyons to the Dry Fork of Coyote Gulch, are narrow and winding canyons that provide opportunities for solitude. Areas containing opportunities for solitude within the WSA aggregate approximately 9,700 acres. Areas within the WSA that exhibit no opportunity for solitude include the Big Hollow Wash and Black Ridge areas southwest of the Dry Fork of Coyote Gulch, Early Weed Bench, and Allen Dump.

The Scorpion Flat area is a relatively flat, undifferentiated, and sparsely vegetated flat extending to the rim of the Escalante River Canyon. The Scorpion Flat landscape consists of broken patchwork patterns of sand and slickrock, but it provides little opportunity for solitude. About 14,700 acres of the Scorpion Flat are within the WSA.

The Twentyfive Mile Wash portion of the WSA is a large slickrock basin, which enhances the opportunity for visitors to find isolation and seclusion. The tributaries to Twentyfive Mile Wash and the Dry Fork of Coyote Gulch exhibit concentrations of deep slots that are not equaled elsewhere in the Escalante River drainage. The main stream channel of Twentyfive Mile Wash is entrenched and sinuous along most of its length and exhibits an outstanding opportunity for solitude.

C. Primitive and Unconfined Recreation

The total acreage providing outstanding opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation is approximately 11,400 acres, while 24,484 acres do not meet the standard.

The WSA offers outstanding opportunities for backpacking, horseback riding, hiking, sightseeing, and photography. The outstanding opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation in the WSA are derivative of the individual quality of several activities rather than the presence of a wide spectrum of activities.

Hiking is often associated with sightseeing and photography. The narrow tributary canyons and intervening slickrock areas of Twentyfive Mile Wash; the tributary canyons to the Dry Fork of Coyote Gulch, such as Spooky Gulch and Brimstone Gulch; portions of upper Brimstone Gulch; and various sections of the Dry Fork all exhibit some unique and highly aesthetic landscapes. These canyons are intriguing and provide challenging photographic subjects. Because they are so narrow and tortuous, they are ideal canyons for an exploratory type of hiking.

Backpacking and horseback riding opportunities are suitable in the same parts of the WSA. In most cases, these two activities are related to overnight or longer trips into the GCNRA where the Escalante River and Coyote Gulch Canyons are backpacking and horseback riding destinations. The Twentyfive Mile Wash Canyon provides direct access to the Escalante River. The Egypt slickrock area provides access to the river via Fence Canyon from the roadhead at the Allen Dump promontory. In both cases, the routes through the WSA have excellent photographic and sightseeing attributes and the routes themselves provide fine backpacking and horseback riding experiences. The tributary canyon to Twentyfive Mile Wash near the GCNRA in Sections 24 and 25 could be considered a destination within the WSA for overnight foot or horseback trips. The other area having backpacking opportunity in the WSA occurs in the Dry Fork of Coyote Gulch. Dry Fork provides backpacking access to Coyote Gulch and the Escalante River. The Twentyfive Mile Wash Canyon and the Dry Fork provide primitive recreational opportunity as well as access to destinations in the GCNRA.

Sightseeing and photographic opportunities are outstanding in the Twentyfive Mile Wash drainage in areas where backpacking, horseback riding, and hiking opportunities are not outstanding. The upper Twentyfive Mile Wash drainage area exhibits the largest expanse of exposed Navajo Sandstone slickrock in the middle Escalante River drainage. Opportunities for sightseeing and photography are also excellent in sections of the Dry Fork of Coyote Gulch.

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D. Special Features

Landscapes in the WSA are characteristic of the scenic geology of the Escalante River basin. The aggregate area of scenic special features is about 11,100 acres.

The Twentyfive Mile Wash Canyon and one tributary canyon are entrenched and meandering, cut into red sandstone, and support riparian vegetation. The contrasts of colors and of forms represent the classic scenery of the Glen Canyon-Escalante Canyon region, and are typical of the western tributary canyon to the Escalante River from Davis Gulch to Harris Wash.

The Twentyfive Mile Wash is entrenched in a large basin below the Allen Dump and the Early Weed Bench-Scorpion cliffs. This physiographic feature is of esthetic value because it is composed almost entirely of exposed slickrock. It represents the largest rock exposure of this type on the west side of the Escalante River below Highway 12. Some areas of this slickrock exhibit parallel cracks, small domes, and winding slots that enhance its scenic value.

The Dry Fork of Coyote Gulch Canyon is an unusual landscape feature because it is one of the few major western drainages to the Escalante River lacking riparian vegetation. The Dry Fork landscape consists of a shallow, winding canyon containing dune areas and several narrows. The scenic value of the Dry Fork of Coyote Gulch is enhanced by several extremely narrow and tortuous side canyons. Spooky Gulch and Brimstone Gulch are named examples.

The upper Brimstone Gulch-Cat Pasture area below Early Weed Bench is a small area with impressive scenic features, including colorful slickrock domes, short box canyons, and small buttes.

Peregrine falcons and bald eagles, which are listed as endangered species, may occasionally use the WSA. The study area has a small population of cougar which is a wildlife species associated with wilderness. Seven other animal species and five plant species which are considered to be sensitive occur, or may occur, in the WSA. Refer to Appendix 4

and the Affected Environment, Vegetation and Wildlife Including Special Status Species sections of the Utah BLM Statewide Wilderness Final EIS for additional information.

Diversity in the National Wilderness Preservation System (NWPS)

A. Expanding the Diversity of Natural Systems and Features as Represented by Ecosystems

Wilderness designation of this WSA would add a combination of potential natural vegetation (PNV) ecosystems not presently represented in the NWPS.

PNV is the vegetative type that would eventually become climax vegetation if not altered by human interference, and is not necessarily the vegetation that is currently present in an area.

The WSA is in the Colorado Plateau Province/Ecoregion. The PNV in the WSA is juniper-pinyon woodland (5,884 acres) and galleta-threawn shrubsteppe (30,000 acres). Juniper-pinyon woodland PNV is represented in the NWPS both nationally and in Utah and in BLM study areas both in and outside of Utah. Galleta-threawn shrubsteppe is not represented in the NWPS, however, although it is represented in 10 other WSAs, all in Utah.

Designation of the Scorpion WSA would expand the diversity of natural systems in the NWPS and would add a combination of ecosystems not now represented. This information is summarized in Table 2 from data compiled in December 1989.

B. Assessing the Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive Recreation within a Days Driving Time (5 Hours) of Major Population Centers

The WSA is not within a 5-hour drive of any major population centers.

C. Balancing the Geographic Distribution of Wilderness Areas

The Scorpion WSA would not contribute significantly to balancing the geographic distribution of wilderness areas within the NWPS. As of January 1987, the NWPS included 64 areas totaling about 2,834,115 acres in Utah and Arizona.

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TABLE 2
ECOSYSTEM REPRESENTATION

BAILEY-KUHLER CLASSIFICATION (PNV)	NWPS AREAS		OTHER BLM STUDIES	
	AREAS	ACRES	AREAS	ACRES
NATIONWIDE (COLORADO PLATEAU PROVINCE)				
Juniper-Pinyon Woodland	10	1,393,647	84	2,137,221
Galleta-Threeawn Shrubsteppe	0	0	10	160,726
UTAH (COLORADO PLATEAU PROVINCE)				
Juniper-Pinyon Woodland	1	20,000	53	1,676,198
Galleta-Threeawn Shrubsteppe	0	0	10	160,726

Source: BLM File Data.

There are seven designated wilderness areas within 100 miles of the WSA. In a clockwise direction beginning to the north area the 26,000-acre Box-Death Hollow Wilderness (Forest Service [FS]), the 45,000-acre Dark Canyon Wilderness (FS), the 112,000-acre Paria Canyon-Vermilion Cliffs Wilderness (BLM), the 6,860-acre Cottonwood Point Wilderness (BLM), the 70,500-acre Kanab Creek Wilderness (FS and BLM units), the 40,600-acre Saddle Mountain Wilderness (FS), and the 7,000-acre Ashdown Gorge Wilderness (FS).

Manageability (The area must be capable of being managed effectively to preserve its wilderness character.)

The entire WSA, including the 14,978 acres recommended for wilderness designation, can be managed as wilderness to preserve values now present in the area. Resource and land use conflicts are not now a problem in the WSA and are not anticipated to be in the future. There are no mineral leases or mining claims to interfere with wilderness management. Livestock grazing and maintenance of about a 0.5 mile of fence would continue but would not affect wilderness values.

Two sections of State land (1,280 acres) are in the part of the WSA not recommended for wilderness. However, there are no resource values in the area that would create a need for access to these lands.

Energy and Mineral Resource Values

The U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) and the U.S. Bureau of Mines (USBM) examined the area proposed for wilderness and prepared a mineral assessment report for the Scorpion WSA (USGS Bulletin 1747-C, Susan Bartsch-Winkler, et al., 1989). The report indicates that demonstrated subeconomic resources of less than 30,000 short tons of gypsum are estimated to occur in the study area, i.e., the portion of the WSA recommended for wilderness designation. The Navajo Sandstone could have industrial uses, but it is not considered an economic resource within the study area due to the distance from markets. Sand deposits in the study area are not unique, and similar deposits are closer to existing markets. The mineral resource potential for undiscovered gypsum is low. The energy resource potential for geothermal resources is also low. The mineral resource potential for metals other than uranium is low. The energy resource potential for oil, gas, and carbon dioxide is moderate.

Impacts on Resources

The comparative impact table (Table 3) summarizes the effects of wilderness designation or nondesignation on wilderness values which are considered to be the only resource values that would be significantly affected.

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Local Social and Economic Considerations

Social and economic factors were not considered to be significant issues in the EIS.

Summary of WSA-Specific Public Comments

Public involvement has occurred throughout the wilderness review process. Comments received during the early stages of the EIS preparation were used to develop significant study issues and alternatives for the ultimate management of the WSA.

During formal public review of the Draft EIS, a total of 114 inputs specifically addressing this WSA were received from 652 commenters, including oral statements received at 17 public hearings on the EIS. Each letter or oral testimony was considered to be one input. Duplicate letters or oral statement by the same commenter were not counted as additional inputs or signatures. Each individual was credited with one signature or testimony regardless of the number of inputs.

In general, 391 commenters supported wilderness designation for part or all of the WSA, while 257 commenters were opposed. Four commenters addressed the relative merits of the EIS, but took no formal position on wilderness designation.

The majority of those favoring wilderness designation were from other states. Of particular concern to the commenters was the perceived need to protect wilderness values, preserve the values in the WSA for future generations, and to add to the diversity in the NWPS.

Those opposing wilderness were concerned that wilderness would conflict with or preclude mineral exploration and development, livestock operations, flood control and water rights, public access, or other uses; is not compatible with multiple use; would harm State and local economies; and that designation is not necessary to protect the WSA. The great majority of those opposed were from rural Utah.

Two Federal agencies, the National Park Service (NPS) and USBM commented on the

Draft EIS. The NPS stated that the all wilderness alternative would be the preferred alternative. The NPS noted that the Scorpion WSA is a special concern because it includes the upper reaches of Coyote Gulch, the most heavily used backpacking area in the GCNRA.

The USBM did not take a position regarding designation or nondesignation but commented that BLM understated the petroleum potential and overstated the silver potential of the Scorpion WSA.

No comment letters were received on the Final EIS.

There are no State lands in the portion of the WSA recommended for wilderness designation. In commenting on the Draft EIS, the State of Utah expressed general opposition to wilderness designation but did not take a definite position regarding wilderness designation of the WSA. The State considers the WSA to have relatively low quality wilderness values and low conflicts. Although the State noted that there is little conflict with the uranium in the Circle Cliffs Favorable Area, gas company reports indicate that there is high potential for economic accumulations of oil and gas.

The Garfield and Kane County Commissions are opposed to wilderness designation of the Scorpion WSA and have endorsed the Consolidated Local Government Response to Wilderness that opposes wilderness designation of BLM lands in Utah.

The Kane County Master Plan rejects wilderness as an exclusionary form of recreation that cannot be used by the average visitor. Garfield County previously proposed to the Utah Congressional Delegation that 111,053 acres of BLM lands in three WSAs and 31,600 acres in one FS unit in the County be recommended as wilderness. The Garfield County Master Plan recommends that the remaining lands in the County, including the Scorpion WSA, be retained for multiple uses.

In commenting on the Draft EIS, the Counties stated that the Scorpion WSA is best suited as a possible addition to the GCNRA for developed recreation in the Twentyfive Mile Wash and Coyote Gulch areas as identified in the NPS management plan. The Counties believe

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that such recreational use will benefit the local economies and recreationists much more than wilderness designation, and that nondesignation will allow for possible future development of the identified uranium deposits.

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Table 3
Comparative Summary of Impacts by Alternative

Issue Topic	Alternatives		
	Recommendation Partial Wilderness (14,978 Acres)	No Action/No Wilderness	All Wilderness (35,884 Acres)
Impacts on Wilderness Values	<p>Wilderness values would be preserved over all in the designated area which would be approximately 42 percent of the WSA. In the foreseeable future, naturalness and opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation would be reduced in quality on 4 acres of the WSA. Most special features would be preserved. Vehicular activity (3 miles of ways) in the nondesignated portion would continue to be an occasional annoyance that would detract from opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation in the WSA. This alternative would complement and enhance the NPS proposal for wilderness designation and management of the contiguous NRA lands. However, developments related to providing access to contiguous proposed NPS wilderness may not be allowed.</p>	<p>Wilderness values would not be protected by wilderness designation. In the foreseeable future, naturalness and opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation would be reduced in quality on 4 acres of the WSA. Special features including scenic features, Class A scenery, endangered and sensitive species, wildlife associated with wilderness, and perennial streams would not be significantly affected. Vehicular activity (4 miles of ways) would continue to occasionally detract from opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation. This alternative would not complement the NPS proposal for wilderness designation and management of contiguous GCNRA lands. However, development related to providing access to the contiguous proposed NPS wilderness would be allowed.</p>	<p>Wilderness designation would preserve wilderness values overall within the WSA. In the foreseeable future, wilderness values would be reduced in quality on 4 acres by development of rangeland projects, but wilderness management criteria would be met. Special features would be preserved. This alternative would complement and enhance the NPS proposal for wilderness designation and management of contiguous GCNRA lands. However, developments related to providing access to contiguous proposed NPS wilderness may not be allowed.</p>